



MAMLECHET HACHAI: ANIMAL VALUE

HAVE YOU EVER ENCOUNTERED AN ANIMAL OR INSECT—ANY LIVING THING—YOU THOUGHT WAS USELESS OR WORSE?

- Which one did you think was useless?
- What did you do with it?
- Do you think we should get rid of all of its kind?
- Does anyone think we should keep it and, if so, why?
- Can anyone think of a reason why we shouldn't kill off *any* specie of animal?

THE RABBIS UNDERSTOOD THAT CERTAIN ANIMALS AND INSECTS COULD BE DANGEROUS

- They knew that flies can carry disease.
- They knew that the saliva of rabid animals was dangerous.

BUT THEY TAUGHT THAT EVEN THOSE CREATURES WHICH ARE TOTALLY REPUGNANT TO US MAY POSSESS GOOD QUALITIES

- The snail was useful for curing scabs
- The housefly helped with hornet-stings.
- The mosquito helped with snake poison.

THE RABBIS RESPECTED ALL LIVING CREATURES, BUT THEY WERE NOT AWED BY THEM.

- They studied the animals carefully to learn how they could be used and should be cared for—like treating bone dislocations.
- Some of rabbis, nearly 2,000 years ago, even did what we might think of as scientific experiments—studying nesting habits of birds, and observing the behavior of ants, and the like.

THE MOST IMPORTANT THING TO REMEMBER IS THAT IN THE TORAH, AN ANIMAL IS DESCRIBED AS A “LIVING SOUL.”

- What do you think a “soul” is? (According to the Sefer Ha-Aggadah, one way to understand the “soul” is as our “distinctive character”—that unique part of us created in the image of God with the capacity to do the will of God.)

- How might the fact that animals have a living soul change our thinking about not destroying them?

THERE IS A SAYING THAT, "A HUNGRY DOG WILL SWALLOW HIS OWN EXCREMENT."

- That's a pretty gross idea—and what's it got to do with the soul?
- Rabbah bar Mari related a Proverb (27:7), an old and very wise lesson, that says in effect: The soul that's satisfied doesn't even want the sweetness of honey; but to the hungry soul even the bitterest taste is sweet."
- How do you imagine our souls can get so "hungry" that even the bitterest taste is sweet? (If we deprive them of the satisfaction and goodness that comes by learning the Torah and doing mitzvot, we become so poisoned that the bitterest kind of life is all that's left open to us.)



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